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Poetry

The Sonny Liston Fan Club

poor lame
bo

zos
I feel
so-o-o

sad
for all
the
Sams,

Stans, Dans, Dukes,
dudes, duds, Buds,
Bobs, Robs, Randys,
Mandys, Maggies, mar-
rieds, Marys, Garys,
Gabbys, crabbies, Cabs,
Babses, Sabus and
Beaus

as they all
LOVE
one another

AND

die

—Richard Meltzer

From the poet's yet-to-be-published '86 travel diary.

a broad spectrum of ragtime music and history. Authentic recordings go back 80 years and more, and Wilkes explores new rag artists as well. KCSN 88.5 FM, Sun., 7-9 p.m.

ALIEN AIR MUSIC A mixture of electronic and progressive music. KXLU 88.9 FM, Sun., 9:30-11 p.m.

RADIO COLLUSION No genre is safe from the prying musical ears of Paul Sarolian. Unusual music from pop to art. KPFK 90.7 FM, Mon., 6-7 a.m.

EVENING BECOMES ECLECTIC Isabel Holt puts together an inventive mix of all genres of music. You name it . . . KCRW 89.9 FM, Mon. & Wed.-Fri., 8-10 p.m.

SOUNDINGS A rotating program of audio art, music and performance, produced by Jacki Apple. Listen on the second Tuesday of each month to Tom Recchion and Tony Mostrom, who blend free improvisation, Martin Denny, and the King Sisters. KPFK 90.7 FM, Tues., 8:30-9 p.m.

IMAGINARY LANDSCAPE Carl Stone hosts a program of new, unusual and experimental music. KPFK 90.7 FM, Tues., 9:30-11:30 p.m.

HEARTS OF SPACE Meditative electronic music to wake up to. KPFK 90.7 FM, Wed., 6-7 a.m.

THE IAN WHITCOMB SHOW Focusing on Tin Pan Alley-style tunes, from the turn of the century to the dawn of the rock era. KCRW 89.9 FM, Wed., 2-3 p.m.

Spoken Word

TERRITORY OF ART The MOCA commissioned series of original "radio art" continues with "TV Times," a collaboration by writers Paul Krassner and Ilene Segalove and producer Stephen Proffitt. KUSC 91.5 FM, Mon., 10-10:30 p.m.

KCRW PLAYHOUSE A wild assortment of radio drama, mysteries, adventures, science fiction. The line-up changes all the time, so stay tuned. KCRW 89.9 FM, Mon.-Fri., 3-4 p.m. & 7-8 p.m.

JOE FRANK'S JOURNAL His darkly funny and penetrating narratives are unforgettable. KCRW 89.9 FM, Fri., 7 p.m. (repeats Sun., 9 a.m.)

MIKE HODEL'S HOUR 25 Harlan Ellison and Terry Hodel take over the controls of this excellent call-in program for the speculative fiction fan. KPFK 90.7 FM, Fri., 10 p.m.-mid.

A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION Garrison Keillor's acerbic history of Lake Wobegon began as this smash hit radio program. Not to be missed. KUSC 91.5 FM, Sat., 6 p.m.; rebroadcast Sun., 2 p.m.

THE POETRY CONNECTION Wanda Coleman and Austin Straus host this showcase for new and old local poets. KPFK 90.7 FM, Sat., 6:30-7:30 p.m.

MATCH NITE Susan Block hosts a call-in personals column. Talk about yourself or chat with prospective dates . . . interesting to listen to even if you aren't looking. KIEV 87 AM, Sat., 8:30-9:30 p.m.

SUSAN BLOCK'S MATCH NITE More dating over the airwaves with Susan and a special weekly guest. KFOX 93.5 FM, Mon., 9-11 p.m.

OPEN MIND A swell talk show covering metaphysical and New Age concepts, Fortean phenomena and unexplained events. Hosted by Bill Jenkins. KABC 79 AM, Sat., 9 p.m.-mid.

CYNIC'S CHOICE A delightful program of British humour and music, ranging from the Goon Show to Spike Milligan and back again. Now in its 18th year, this show consistently provides the best in British nostalgia and tomfoolery. Brian Clewer hosts. KFAC 1330 AM, Sun., 10 a.m.-noon.

THE MAN SAYS YES Believe it or not, a genuine radio game show that listeners can play at home and call in to win! Bob Shannon and Dee Dee Dunnavan host. KCSN 88.5 FM, Sun., 2:30-3 p.m.

THE LEIGH SPEAR SHOW A magazine-format talk program on topics of special interest to the gay community. KFOX 93.5 FM, Sun., 4 p.m.

THE HEALTH CONNECTION Dr. Gershon Lesser answers your questions about holistic health and lifestyles. KCRW 89.9 FM, Wed., 12:30-1 p.m.

ACCENT ON WOMEN A lively half-hour magazine format featuring interviews, info, advice and the latest "hot flashes." KCSN 88.5 FM, Wed., 6:30 p.m.

THE MS. BIZ Magazine-format program for the woman who wants to get ahead and the man who wants to keep up. Interviews and current events to inform and amuse the upscale working woman. KFOX 93.5 FM, Thurs., 8 a.m.

—Bill Raden

READINGS

CHARLENE SPRETNAK, author of *The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics*, speaks about the subject and signs her book. Midnight Special Bookstore, 1350 Santa Monica Mall, S.M.; Thurs., Jan. 22, 5 p.m.; (213) 393-2923.

ERIC BENTLEY, playwright, theater critic and translator, autographs his works. A Different Light Bookstore, 4014 Santa Monica Blvd., Silver Lake; Sat., Jan. 24, 4-6 p.m. (213) 668-0629.

—Karen Wilson

Knode *continued from page 28*

subject matter. The plays represent a truly collective experience, and those "moments of recognition" that aestheticians talk about are frequent and palpable in the spectators. As a matter of fact, the best comic writing all year was Sarah Dreher's *8 x 10 Glossy*, the wry story of a gay woman who returns home and discovers her beloved father was really an intolerable jerk.

Although it's unusually mature and entertaining, *8 x 10 Glossy* still isn't critical or curative in Moliere's sense of "exposing vices to the world's ridicule" and attempting to "correct" them. Like the overwhelming majority of dramatic writing in America, *Glossy* has no grand moral or historical ambitions. (It's not as though playwrights try and fail; they don't even try.) Many of the greatest plays, of course, focus on very local, mundane things: the self, psychology, family, moving to Moscow. But they imply larger questions about society and the human condition. In contemporary American drama, on the other hand, parochial concerns remain purely on a parochial level. Symptomatic of this chronically narrow viewpoint (and indicative of the budget crunch and the influence of performance art) is the prominence of the autobiographical monologist in theater, of anybody with a past and a mouth to talk about it. Scores of them pass through L.A. every year, mostly men — among them Steven Banks, Burke Byrnes, Rob Sullivan, Dale Gonyea, Tim Miller, Jan Munroe and Spalding Gray. Humor is indispensable to this format, which at its best produces the neurotic global vision of a Gray, but more frequently produces a Gonyea or a Banks, Me Generation grotesques whose sole ambition is to become a legend in their own time.

Genres blur and fade away as other monologists adapt stand-up comedy delivery, impersonation and dramatic storytelling to the one-person show. Again, humor is of the essence. From English fringe lunatics such as Oscar McLennan and Anne Seagrave to New Yorkers Paul Zaloom, Ann Magnuson, Karen Finlay and Sandra Bernhard; from Peter Bergman of Firesign Theater fame to locals John Fleck and Lily Tomlin — lone performers put out the best that theater has had to offer in the way of laughs. With the exception of Tomlin, they work inside a fairly restricted community, speaking to the values and opinions of trendies and liberals; they're the Bob Hopes of the underground set. Most of these performers are cultural critics — that is, they deal primarily with cultural phenomena such as TV preachers and Reagan's image; they do not go deeply into social, political or economic issues.

Peter Bergman straddles the line between the '60s and the '80s. While he talks about culture, he's also more genuinely critical and moralistic than those mentioned above. (Bergman can make you uncomfortable with his toxic babies and nasty game shows.) But the thing that the dramatic storytellers — funky or mainstream — seem most to generate in their audience is *complaisance*, a handy French word that connotes both complacency and complicity. *Complaisance* is the key to Lily Tomlin's success in her one-woman theater piece *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*, written by Jane Wagner. She portrays bag ladies, punk girls and bored rich women with some acuity, but never indicts her audience (or her characters, really), preferring to skim clearly along the surface of appearances rather than ask larger questions. Her best vignette, the story of a '60s radical feminist who evolves into an '80s Superwoman, is unanalytical and inconclusive, but then, the whole show is based on an innocuous premise: that earthlings look pretty stupid to aliens. I got the impression that it wouldn't matter *what* Tomlin said: The audience interacted primarily with her fame. (The medium is the message.)

I used to be persuaded by something stand-up legend Paul Krassner once said about comedy. In his opinion, reality was so absurd and unbelievable that the comedian's only job was to inventory reality. The news is weirder than anything he could think up. Looking at the pathetic inadequacies of what little political satire exists in contemporary theater — *Rapmaster Ronnie*, Jack Slater's *Rank, Violence: The Misadventures of Spike Spangle, Farmer* by the Actors Gang, Ebbe Roe Smith's *The Political Thing* — it's easy to agree with Krassner. What could be more ludicrous than the notion that the president okayed something while under sedation (never mind that it was illegal and immoral)? Or more inherently satirical than the fact that our virulently anti-drug administration financed contra suppliers suspected of dealing cocaine?

But the reasons why comedy is toothless, irrelevant, egocentric and complacent are more complex than the mere fact that reality is monstrous. Krassner recognizes the difficulty in which comedy finds itself; and he takes the monstrous absurdity of reality as a challenge to go even *farther* out. But he's practically alone. Why aren't more comic writers digging in their heels and protesting the state of things? Why can't anyone get a good enough grasp on things to construct an intelligent, humorous dramatic narrative? Why do Americans seem to have abandoned themselves to senselessness?

Part of the answer, I think, lies in the fragmentation of American society. Not only is it sprawling, heterogenous and hostile, people don't have any sense of what its organizational principles are. To be critical and curative, comedy needs to speak directly to an audience's collective perceptions and experiences. But comedy can't do that as long as Americans possess only a dim sense that they have anything in common with each other — besides, that is, what they buy and what they watch.

• • •

Last week, at the opening of the Los Angeles Poverty Department's *No Stone for Studs Schwartz* at the Boyd St. Theater downtown, I laughed harder than I've ever laughed in the theater. The LAPD is an ensemble composed of homeless people. In group rehearsals, they developed the story of a guy who gets shot in Union Station and flashes back through his life before dying. It wasn't just the material or the improvisation that was funny; all that was very sporadic. I laughed because I recognized the reality of their situation — aesthetically, politically, socially and economically. And that their reality is my reality: American under Reagan. Artistically, they clung to the brink of failure as people forgot their lines, blocking fell apart, actors failed to show up. I got drawn into this collective act of imagination and prayed for their success. Politically, the very existence of the LAPD ridicules the idea that the homeless are all on the street for good reason and ridicules the politicians who say it. They stand as an indictment of social policies. They'll change your ideas. I call that comedy. ■

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